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Charles Dickinson Adams

1839-1889

"I climb the hill: from end to end
Of all the landscape underneath,
I find no place that does not breathe
Some gracious memory of my friend."

Florence Baxter Adams *Prof. H. B. Adams*
John Hopkins
Baltimore

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Prof. J. B. Adams.

"We will do likewise; death hath made no breach
In love, and sympathy, in hope, and trust;
No outward sign or sound our ears can reach,
But there's an inward, spiritual speech,
That greets us still, though mortal tongues be dust."

CHARLES DICKINSON ADAMS

1839-1889

TWENTY-SIX years ago a son of Amherst went forth with the highest academic distinction from Amherst College to enter the struggle of professional life as a lawyer in New York City. On Saturday, March 23, his body was brought home by family friends from the field, where he had fallen with his face fronting the battle, to be buried upon a peaceful, sunlit slope, sheltered by a background of noble forest-trees and looking towards his oldest home among the northern hills, towards his second home in the eastern valley where his mother was born and still lives, and towards Amherst College, his *alma mater* whom also he loved and revered as became a loyal son. By a curious fitness,

remarked by old friends and relatives, this natural leader, first born in a family of three brothers, first baptized in the present Congregational Church of East Amherst, where his father and mother worshipped, first always in honor as well as in the alphabet, whether at school or college, was also the first to be buried in the new and beautiful cemetery lately selected upon the highlands of Amherst.

Charles Dickinson Adams sprang from good New England stock, well known in various parts of the country for its native vigor and persistent energy. On his father's side he was descended from Henry Adams of Braintree (now Quincy), who came to this country with eight sons and one daughter in 1634. Of these only one son, Joseph Adams, remained in Braintree. He was the ancestor of John Adams, John Quincy, Charles Francis, and the entire Quincy line. The other seven brothers settled in various towns in Eastern Massachusetts and from one of them, Edward Adams of Medfield, sprang the Western Massachusetts branch of the numerous Adams tribe. The first settler in these

parts was Thomas Adams, who lived in North Amherst, near Leverett. He was taxed in Amherst in 1740 for owning a mill and a negro. His three daughters were members of the First Church of Amherst. The eldest of his five sons, Asa, first took up a farm in 1759 on the edge of Shutesbury. The family retained church connections with Amherst and went with the second parish upon its secession from the first. The aforesaid Asa Adams, his eldest son, Asa, and the latter's second son, Nathaniel Dickinson, were the immediate ancestors of Charles Dickinson Adams. The name Dickinson was introduced into the family in honor of a famous lawyer in Western Massachusetts, Nathaniel Dickinson, "Squire Nat," a graduate of Harvard College and a delegate from Amherst to the first Provincial Congress. The family name of Dickinson and the Christian name of the first Adams settler in Amherst have both been perpetuated by Thomas Dickinson Adams, of Washington, D. C., the youngest son of Major Henry M. Adams, a brother of the subject of this sketch.

On his mother's side Charles Dickinson

Adams was descended from Deacon Thomas Hastings, of Watertown, Massachusetts, who like Henry Adams came to this country in 1634. Deacon Hastings was a Puritan offshoot of an old English family and was the ancestor of many branches of the Hastings tribe in this country. His son, Dr. Thomas Hastings, settled in Hatfield, and was the first physician for that town, for Northampton, Hadley, Deerfield, and the whole country round. He was also the first school teacher in Hatfield. He transmitted his name and medical practice to Dr. Thomas Hastings, Jr. From him descended three generations of men, each patriarch bearing the name of Thomas Hastings. The third was the father of Harriet Hastings, who married Nathaniel Dickinson Adams, December 1, 1836. Charles Dickinson Adams was born October 11, 1839. He received his first training in the little district-school house at "Pratt Corner," where Mr. Constantine, the Greek, and other Amherst College students afterwards held Sunday services. Just above the old school-house, on the main road to Shutesbury, the two pioneers

bearing the names of Asa Adams are buried side by side.

The next school attended by Charles D. Adams was at North Amherst "City," near the old home of the first settler, Thomas Adams. Here the Shutesbury youth, in the midst of a hostile clan of "City" boys, had to make his way alone; but by good scholarship and hard fighting the field was quickly won. In the old school-house at North Amherst, he and Fayette Dickinson began together the study of Latin.

Amherst Academy stimulated the ambitious young student to further endeavors. Standing now by his grave, which overlooks the long road of four miles from Shutesbury to Amherst and the very fields across which he must have often trudged, to save time, one cannot fail to appreciate the pluck and energy which that daily walk to school required. At the old Amherst Academy, which doubtless fired his ambition to go to Amherst College, Adams made some of the best friendships of his life, with men like Mason Tyler, M. F. Dickinson, and Rufus P. Lincoln.

One of these old friends says of him in a letter: "He was always the same earnest and perfectly balanced personage that he has shown himself in manhood. He never wasted any time. He used to walk in from Shutesbury or from his uncle Danforth Bangs' house, where he boarded, and arrive at school just on time. He would usually devote noon-intermission to reading or study and return home immediately after school ended, while other boys would manage to make an hour for play by coming early and tarrying after school. It was with him purely love of study or a conscientious devotion to his books that made him so industrious. . . . There was never any lack of manly vigor about Charley. I remember the instance of a tyrannical bully . . . who during that period attended the Amherst Academy and was a torment and a terror to all of us. One day he pitched upon Charley and received a good thrashing, greatly to our delight."

Leaving Amherst Academy, as Amherst boys often did for the better completion of their preparation for college, young Adams went for

a time to Williston Seminary, East Hampton, Mass. At this institution he was especially intimate with Charles Sweetser (afterwards founder and editor of *The Round Table*, to which Adams was a contributor, in New York); William C. Whitney (recently Secretary of the Navy); Henry D. Hyde (now of the law-firm of Hyde and Dickinson, Boston); and Seth Thomas, of New York, his life-long and devoted friend.

His course was interrupted by the death of his father, September 7, 1856. Although then only seventeen years of age, young Adams took upon himself the responsible task of settling his father's estate, which was somewhat complicated by reason of a copartnership with an older brother, Ward Adams. Besides disentangling property-interests, he planned and built a house for his mother and brothers in East Amherst upon a lot bought from James Hastings. To this new home he transplanted the family in 1857. Soon after he returned to East Hampton and graduated with the valedictory in 1859.

The record of Charles D. Adams at Amherst College is well remembered by many people in Amherst and does not need to be reviewed. Successful in every field of scholarship, winning all the prizes that could be won, and leaving behind him a reputation which endures to this day, he was perhaps strongest in those arts and studies which were not required in the regular curriculum. He devoted much of his time to private reading, to the cultivation of a knowledge of good literature, a pursuit which he steadily maintained throughout his busy professional life. The number and variety of good books that he managed to read, in college and out, were constant sources of amazement to his friends. He was never known to waste his time upon literary trash or the latest novel; but he sedulously cultivated an acquaintance with the great masters. He read and re-read his classics, even after graduating from college. Many of the choicest passages of literature, ancient and modern, were at his tongue's end. And withal he was a diligent student of the arts of literary expression, of oratory, and of the resources of

skilful debate. So eminent was he as a finished writer and as a polished speaker that many of his friends prophesied for him a distinguished career in letters, or upon the platform, or in politics. There can be no doubt that, had he chosen to give himself to public life instead of to the successful practice of a good profession, he could have achieved a more brilliant although perhaps a less substantial success. Those lectures of his, which citizens of North Amherst and of North Hadley remember to have heard upon "The Middle Kingdom" and upon "The Common People;" those brief but stirring speeches at various college reunions and on decoration day; that eloquent appeal for the revival of oratory, a lost art in many American Colleges (although not now in Amherst),—an appeal made only last summer in the Pratt Gymnasium when he presided at the Alumni Dinner, were all suggestive of the remarkable oratorical power which Charles D. Adams could on occasion put forth. Although kindled to a flame in Amherst College, this power remained a slumbering fire in his after

life. Sometimes it would flash out before a judge or a jury, but it never found its proper vent in public life. The interests of his profession kept him out of politics.

Graduating from Amherst College with the valedictory in 1863, after serving during a part of that year as Principal of the Amherst High School, Mr. Adams taught for one term in the Middle Classical class at Williston Seminary and then went immediately to New York City. Henceforth he declined all opportunities of teaching as a profession, even overtures to take the chair of oratory and English literature in Amherst College. He determined to devote himself absolutely to the law. In less than a year he completed the two years' course at the Columbia College Law School and at the same time was a clerk in the law offices of Weeks, De Forest, and Forster of Wall Street, to whom he brought letters of recommendation from the oldest law-firm in Amherst, Hon. Edward Dickinson and Son. That Dickinson name was always one of good omen, an open *sesame*, in the career of Charles Dickinson Adams, from first

to last. This opening was partly due, however, to the personal good will of Mr. De Forest, of New York, whose son, R. W. De Forest, was one of Mr. Adams' pupils at East Hampton, where the father had met the young instructor and had invited him to enter his law office in the city. Besides doing office work and crowding two years into one at the law school, Mr. Adams, for some time, taught evening classes at the Cooper Institute.

The connection formed with the above lawyers opened the way to a junior partnership in the old and well-established firm of Mann and Rodman. The death of the oldest partner soon left an extensive law practice in the hands of the two younger men, Rodman and Adams; and for more than twenty years they continued together, constantly widening their clientage and adding to their business reputation. By a kind of tacit agreement Mr. Rodman devoted himself to certain kinds of office practice, the care of estates, etc., while Mr. Adams took the lead in cases requiring special pleas before judge or jury. In later years Mr. Adams developed

a peculiar aptitude for patent law and some of his most important cases were in this field. Although the firm had in its employ a number of clerks, Mr. Adams was always noted for giving personal attention to the details of every case which he undertook. Upon this mastery of every point involved in a trial, his practical success often turned. What he did he always did well. He could do nothing by halves. He treated every client as he would himself have wished to be treated in similar case. He was conscientious and faithful to a degree sometimes surprising to his best friends. One of the most remarkable illustrations of his character was his economical management of the last census in New York City (1880). He directed this arduous task at great personal sacrifice and inconvenience, employing his own valuable time on work for which he might have had an army of clerks, for the simple purpose of saving money to the United States Goverment and executing a clean and satisfactory piece of work.

Besides his almost religious devotion to the duties of his profession, Mr. Adams was always

actively interested in the social, political, and religious advancement of the city in which he lived. He was a member of the Union League Club and often presided at the meetings of the directors of the New York Juvenile Asylum. In promoting the good work of this excellent charity by good administration and good financial management, as well as by a personal interest in the juvenile cases considered by the board, he was especially successful. He dispatched business with a rapidity that was sometimes startling to gentlemen of leisure, but he was firm and unyielding upon points that seemed to him well taken in business or in morals. Only last summer he was subjected to a storm of personal abuse from the *New York World* for removing certain boys from a domestic environment known to be absolutely bad and unwholesome and sending them into the country. The *World* undertook to be the popular champion of family-rights, but its case broke down at every point. In politics Mr. Adams was a republican and in economics a free trader. Although unfriendly to the economic tendencies of the republican

party, he was of the opinion that in the city of New York a man must stand by the party which encouraged good citizenship and honest government. In church affairs he was influential. He belonged to the Church of the Covenant, of which the Rev. Dr. Vincent was pastor until he became a professor in Union Theological Seminary. The death of Mr. Adams caused the profoundest grief in the church society of which he was a member. The Wednesday evening-meeting following this sad event, March 20, 1889, was virtually a memorial service in his honor.

Mr. Adams' family life was singularly happy and undisturbed by domestic losses or worldly invasions. He married August 14, 1873, at Clinton, N. Y., Miss Mary Clark Wood. Two children were born to them: Georgiana Wood, September 29, 1874; and Mason Tyler, May 18, 1877. The latter was named in honor of a school and college friend, Col. Mason Tyler, of New York, son of Professor William S. Tyler of Amherst. Mrs. Adams and the two children are well known in Amherst, where they have

spent several summers. For some years the family was in the habit of spending the hot weather on Long Island, whence the busy lawyer could easily reach New York : but in recent summers Mr. Adams plainly took increasing satisfaction in long vacations spent in his native town. Although he professed a dislike for rural life, of which he had had perhaps far too much in his earlier years ; although he never cared for fancy farming, lawn-mowing, gardening, or other out-door employments ; nevertheless the charming drives over the beautiful hills of Pelham, Belchertown, and Shutesbury had for him the delight of fresh discovery ; they had once been long and dreary roads. Most of all he enjoyed the quiet, peaceful outlook over the western and eastern valleys from the piazzas of those houses which he occupied in Amherst during successive summers. Here, with a good book, a magazine, a newspaper, or a cigar, he was as near perfect happiness as was possible for him outside his own home in New York. There was no place on earth he liked so well as that city-home, with his family and his

library around him. But there was no scenery in the world so pleasing to him as that of Amherst. Upon College hill he once said to the writer of this sketch, " You may travel far without finding such a view as this." And he knew what he was saying, for he had seen most of Europe in his four visits abroad and he had wandered far over our western country with Thomas Nast, whose lawyer and friend he was, and whose amusing sketches found their place in Mr. Adams' library.

Although he, his doctor, and other friends well knew, during the past five years, that he was gradually failing in health, neither he nor they seriously thought of his retiring from business. For him forced inactivity and systematic idleness would have been utter misery. He had no sordid ambition for the amassing of great wealth: his professional work and civic duties were his life. Some men are born with what the Germans call a restless energy *eine rastlose Thätigkeit*. It was as much a part of Mr. Adams' nature as was the strong constitution which he inherited from a vigorous

ancestry. His friends all wished to have him spare himself and unload his burdens upon younger men, but shirking was something that he could never learn, although in his later years he took life much more easily and devoted less time to office-work and more to home-enjoyment. Nevertheless, the harsh judgment of the Springfield *Republican* and of the New York press, that "overwork killed him" is doubtless very near the truth. Overwork killed his father and it killed him. This fatal disease has many different names in our eager and earnest American life, rushing onwards like a river to a cataract. But it is useless to quarrel with nature and with fate. Somebody once remonstrated with one of Mr. Adams' maternal ancestors in "Mill Valley" for something which he had determined to do. The old man pointed to the mill-dam hard by and said: "Do you see that water rushing over yonder?" "Yes." "Well, do you see any of it going back?" Thus, in the homely speech of a hard-headed Puritan, we have the whole philosophy of American life. All men of energy are in midstream and they must swim with the

current. Samuel Bowles once said that no life was worth living unless a man was willing to die a little every day. Charles Dickinson Adams, like all men of enterprise and energy, took his life into his hands and made the most he could of given conditions, knowing well what risks he ran. He died as he would have preferred to die, in full career, like a stream seeking the ocean. There may be rapids and there may be falls in such natures as his, but all streams reach at last a peaceful course and the great sea, it matters little when or how.

The last day or two of his life his mind wandered upon many things which had lately occupied his thoughts, but at last it rested, and he murmured repeatedly "Sleep, sleep, —unconsciousness." Such was the peaceful death of a brave man who had nobly run the race of life and whose tired body now deserves a tranquil rest upon the eastern slope of the necropolis of Amherst, commanding a wide horizon of mountain-scenery from Flat Hills to Mt. Holyoke, looking towards the hills where the sun rises, those dear native hills that he loved so well.

Upon that eastern side of Amherst he himself desired to be buried and there his friends have kindly laid him. "He died with his armor on," said Professor Mather, his early instructor in Greek, who stood by his grave. He was ill but three days, and like Achilles, in three days he was able to be in fertile Phthia. He was buried within sight of his old home. But the courageous soul can never be held by earth. The friends of Socrates asked him how he would like to be buried and he replied, "Just as you please, if you can but hold me, and I do not give you the slip." The hero is ever a fighter. Childe Roland blew his trumpet before the Dark Tower of Fate. "Men, my brothers, men the workers" work on forever after they are dead. "Each deed thou hast done dies, revives, goes to work in the world."

The lovers of brave souls and courageous hearts like those two friends and classmates, Frazar A. Stearns and Charles D. Adams, cannot lament them. The one died upon the battle-field of Newberne, in the beauty of his youth, and the other fell in the glory of his

manhood in the struggle of civic life. One has a cannon for his monument, in the Amherst Art Gallery, a field-piece captured by his regiment in a brilliant charge led by an Amherst Professor. The other has an honored grave upon the heights,—

“Companions of the good hard ground,
Whereon stout hearts of every clime,
In the battles of all time,
Foothold and couch have found.”

Both men did their duty to country and kindred and both have deserved well. Gratitude for such lives as these is a sentiment which overpowers grief, even for sudden death. The world is better because such men have lived in it. One who owes everything to the dead and who loved him as a younger loves an elder brother who had stood in a father's stead, could not find it in his heart to mourn in springtime in the beautiful town of Amherst, whither he had come to seek a burial-place for the departed the day before the funeral.

At the services, which were conducted by the

Rev. Dr. McIlvaine, assisted by a former pastor, Dr. Vincent, at Mr. Adams' own home, 127 East 36th Street, New York City, on Friday, March 22, 1889, the following verses were read by the present pastor. Dr. McIlvaine had quoted them in one of his sermons about two months before and at that time they seemed to strike a responsive chord in Mr. Adams' heart, for he spoke of them after returning from church.

" O birds from out the east,
 O birds from out the west,
 Have ye found that happy city,
 In all your weary quest?
 Tell me, tell me, from earth's wanderings
 May the heart find glad surcease?
 Can ye show me as an earnest
 Any olive branch of peace?

" I am weary of life's troubles,
 Of its sin and toll and care;
 I am faithless, crushing in my heart
 So many a fruitless prayer.
 O birds from out the east,
 O birds from out the west,
 Can ye tell me of that city
 The name of which is Best?

" O little birds, fly east again,
 O little birds, fly west ;
 Ye have found no happy city
 In all your weary quest.
 Still shall ye find no spot of rest
 Wherever ye may stray ;
 And still, like you, the human soul
 Must wing its weary way.

" There sleepeth no such city,
 Within the wide earth's bound ;
 Nor hath the dreaming fancy yet
 Its blissful portals found.
 We are but children, crying here,
 Upon a mother's breast,
 For life, and peace, and blessedness,
 And for eternal rest.

" Bless God, I hear a still small voice,
 Above life's clamorous din,
 Saying : Faint not, O weary one,
 Thou yet mayest enter in.
 That city is prepared for those
 Who well do win the fight ;
 Who tread the wine press till its blood
 Hath washed their garments white.

" Within it is no darkness, nor
 Any baleful flower
 Shall there oppress the weeping eyes
 With stupefying power.

It lieth calm, within the light
Of God's peace-giving breast ;
Its walls are called Salvation,
The city's name is Rest."

The burial was at Amherst, early on Saturday afternoon, upon the quiet hillside, east of the Dickinson grove, with the warm sunlight streaming down the slope and across the valley to those beautiful hills, which had been the strength and inspiration of Mr. Adams' early years. A calm and restful spot it is, amid wide silence, under the great dome of Heaven. Upon Nature's heights there dawns

"A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and the deep heart of man."

To this memorial sketch of Charles Dickinson Adams, his kinsmen and near friends, who saw him buried, and doubtless a wider circle of readers, will be glad to see appended the follow-

ing tributes. The first is by his oldest College Professor, Dr. William S. Tyler, who contributed it to the *Amherst Record* for March 27, 1889 :

"In the recent death of Charles Dickinson Adams, the college and the town of Amherst have lost a son whose name has been endeared to both town and college by many sacred associations, and whose life was adorned by many rare virtues. Though born beyond our border, within the limits of Shutesbury, Amherst has been the home of his mind and heart, of his preparatory and collegiate education ; and though his business has confined him closely to New York during the busy months of the year, no sooner was he released from this bondage than his freed spirit bounded back to his home and his friends, to the forests and the fields, the valleys and the hillsides which he loved and every foot of which he had trodden in his childhood and early youth. No wonder that in his last visit to Amherst, in the summer of 1888, he was looking about for a permanent summer residence and moved by the state of his health, admonished perhaps by some premonitions of his early death, he selected as the last resting-place of his weary and worn body a spot in the

new cemetery, from which he could see his rural birthplace, his village home, the academy and college where he was educated, and all those scenes which were so fresh and fragrant in the memory of his heart. And well might such a lover of the town and the college, of his old teachers and his early friends, of the very soil in which he grew up and the very atmosphere which he first breathed, be the first whose body should be laid to rest in those beautiful grounds where the wise and the good of Amherst for centuries to come will sleep till the resurrection morn.

What "Charlie Adams" (the pet name by which he was most frequently called by his friends and which tells how they loved him), what he was as a boy and a man, as a student and a scholar, as a lawyer, as a citizen, as a gentleman, last not least as a Christian—how the boy was father to the man, for he was always manly and thoughtful, how he was the most faithful student and the best scholar in his class, how he was a leader at the New York bar, as he was everywhere else, how he loved, not his party less but his country more, as he always valued the whole more than a part, how he thought and planned and cared and toiled for his church to the last at the hazard

of his health and life, and how, as modest and unpretending as he was dignified and commanding, he was everywhere and every inch a gentleman, all this needed not be told to anyone in Amherst, for it is known to all who knew him. His last public appearance here, as all will remember, was at our last Commencement, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his graduation, when he presided at the alumni dinner, with a grace and dignity which, we all knew, was characteristic of him and at the same time with a flexibility and a felicity which we scarcely anticipated, which showed that his wit was equal to his wisdom, and that he could make an after-dinner speech as well as he could frame an argument at the bar."

Col. Mason W. Tyler, eldest son of Professor W. S. Tyler, and one of the best friends of Mr. Adams, says:

"I remember with peculiar pleasure his letters. I received a good many from him and have read a good many others. I never received any other letters that moved and thrilled me as his did. They were both elegant and eloquent. He had a

genius for extracting the genuine essences of things and he would serve them to his friends in most delightful and profitable forms. I wish enough of his letters could be collected to make a volume. I have an impression that he put more of his genuine self into his letters than into any other permanent form."

At a meeting of the directors of the New York Juvenile Asylum, held April 2, 1889, the following minute was unanimously adopted.

The sudden death of Charles D. Adams, Esq., which occurred on the 20th of March, leaves a vacancy in this Board of Directors, and in the hearts of all who have been associated with him in the sometime difficult but always interesting work of this institution.

Mr. Adams was elected a member of this Board in 1872, and entered upon service in connection with the Committee on Admissions, Indentures, and Discharges, to the Chairmanship of which he was advanced in 1881.

Upon the death of the late Peter Cooper (in 1884), who had served as Vice-President of the asylum from its organization, Mr. Adams was

unanimously elected to that office, which he filled with ability until his decease.

Under a deep sense of personal bereavement, as of public loss, this Board of Directors desire to place upon record their high appreciation, not alone of the eminent service of Mr. Adams, so cheerfully and patiently rendered in the work of this institution, but also and specially of those qualities of mind and heart which were his passport to a confidence unreserved and a fellowship genial as genuine.

His quiet unobtrusive manner, and courtesy in personal intercourse; his intelligent judgment and safe counsel; his thoughtful discrimination and unselfish devotion; his lofty ideas of official integrity and his loyalty to truth and duty, are all of precious memory and worthy of our emulation.

To the bereaved widow and family, we offer our respectful but cordial sympathy, invoking for them the tenderer sympathy and the diviner care of the Good Shepherd, who, when upon the earth, was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

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